



Fisheries
Transparency
Initiative

TAKING STOCK

Online Transparency of Fisheries
Management Information



**Socialist Republic
of Viet Nam**

© **2024 Fisheries Transparency Initiative.** All rights reserved.

Researcher: Dr. Andre Standing (Fisheries Transparency Initiative)

Design: weeks.de Werbeagentur GmbH



This 'TAKING STOCK: Online Transparency of Fisheries Management Information' assessment for Viet Nam (2024) has been funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

Every effort has been made to verify the accuracy of the information contained in this assessment. All information was believed to be correct as of August 2024. Nevertheless, the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) cannot accept responsibility for the consequences resulting from the use of this assessment or its contents by others.

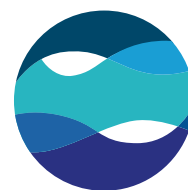
Furthermore, in conducting this assessment, the FiTI did not investigate the veracity or completeness of the published information and did not make any judgement about the integrity of the information or practices disclosed.

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this assessment do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the FiTI concerning the legal or constitutional status of the assessed country, territory or sea area, or the delimitation of frontiers or boundaries.

We would like to thank all the individuals and institutions who contributed to the various stages of research and preparation of this assessment.

The Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) is a global multi-stakeholder initiative that strengthens transparency and collaboration in marine fisheries management.

By making fisheries management more transparent and inclusive, the FiTI promotes informed public debates on fisheries policies and supports the long-term contribution of the sector to national economies and the well-being of citizens and businesses that depend on a healthy marine environment.



Fisheries
Transparency
Initiative

fiti.global

TAKING STOCK: Online Transparency of Fisheries

Management Information assesses the level of information that national authorities in Viet Nam publish on government websites regarding the country's marine fisheries sector.



CONTENTS

Sustainable fisheries need transparency	04
About this assessment	07

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION ON MARINE FISHERIES IN VIET NAM	10
KEY FINDINGS	12
Public access to fisheries information	12
Giving meaning to transparency: Notable examples	15
A DEEP DIVE INTO PUBLIC ACCESS TO FISHERIES INFORMATION	18
Available online?	19
Up to date?	23
Easy to find?	24
'Good transparency practices'	25
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIET NAM NATIONAL AUTHORITIES	26

Transparency needs trust	27
ANNEX: Assessment procedures	28

Viet Nam's TAKING STOCK: Online Transparency of Fisheries Management Information assessment consists of this Summary Assessment Report, as well as an in-depth Detailed Assessment Report.

Both reports, as well as information on the methodology, can be found at:
fiti.global/taking-stock



SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES NEED TRANSPARENCY

For millennia, those who dedicated themselves to fishing, whether for food, income or recreation, did not need to worry about the sustainable management of this natural resource. Fish stocks replenished themselves with ease. **This is no longer the case.** The ocean is under increasing threats from myriad impacts, like climate change, pollution, and overfishing.

Governments have the fundamental obligation to manage common resources, such as fish, on behalf of their citizens. But this invokes a complex challenge: to ensure that fishing and fish trade contribute to income, employment, food and nutrition for millions of people, while conserving marine biodiversity for present and future generations.

Public availability of information is critical to achieving sustainable fisheries. Yet, transparency in fisheries management has not been a priority. Many governments do not disclose basic information on their fisheries sectors, such as laws, permits, fishing agreements, stock assessments, financial contributions, catch data and subsidies. Additionally, there are widespread concerns that companies are not consistently reporting accurate information on catches, fishing practices and payments to governments. The data that is already publicly available is too often incomplete, outdated, unverified, or not readily accessible.

! *Lack of basic transparency could be seen as an underlying facilitator of all the negative aspects of the global fisheries sector – IUU fishing, fleet overcapacity, overfishing, ill-directed subsidies, corruption, poor fisheries management decisions, etc. A more transparent sector would place a spotlight on such activities whenever they occur, making it harder for perpetrators to hide behind the current veil of secrecy and requiring immediate action to be taken to correct the wrong.*

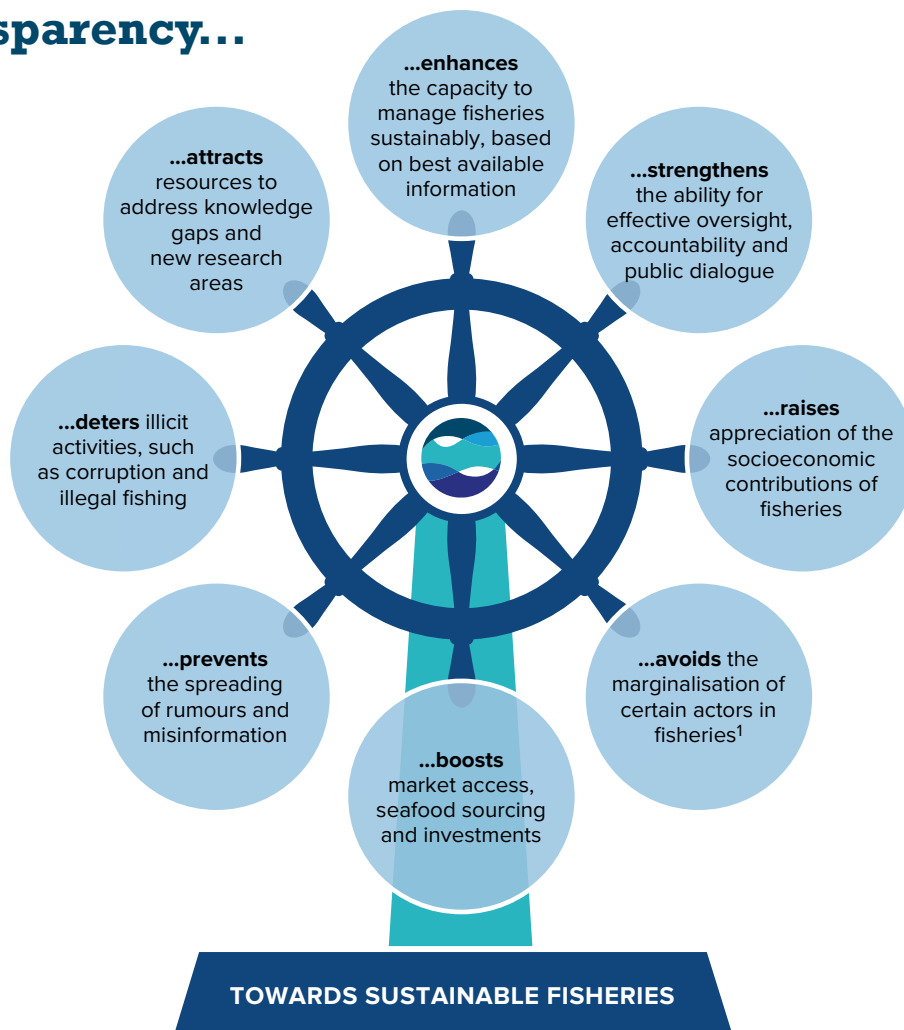
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2010



Enhancing transparency in fisheries management appeals to all stakeholders that appreciate the enormous value of marine fisheries – whether that relates to food and nutrition security, employment, the value to national economies, or the cultural importance of fishing.

Transparency in fisheries management yields multiple benefits, and their relevance and applicability vary depending on the national context.

Transparency...



Promoting these positive features of fisheries lies at the heart of the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI).

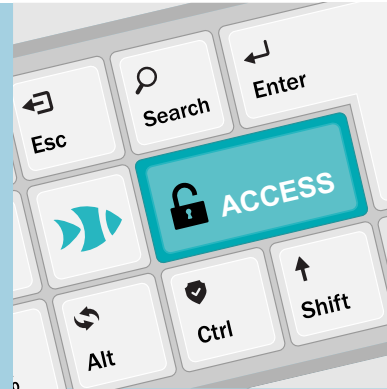


Fisheries
Transparency
Initiative

¹ In particular small-scale fisheries and women.

Transparency is not voluntary. It is a government's duty and a citizen's right!

The provision of accessible, timely and credible information on a country's marine fisheries is increasingly becoming a **legal requirement for governments**, stemming, among other things, from Freedom of Information laws. Such laws are frequently based on three key principles: *public participation, access to justice and access to information*. The last of these principles implies that the public should be able to obtain environmental information (including information about their country's fisheries sector) with only limited, explicitly defined exceptions arising from justifiable confidentiality claims and security matters.



Viet Nam has made strides towards implementing open government practices, yet faces notable limitations. The 2016 Law on Access to Information affords citizens the right to request and receive information from public bodies, although it has been critiqued for its weaknesses by RTI rating standards.²

In 2021, the government launched a National Digital Transformation Programme aimed at digitising government-held information, enhancing internet accessibility, and expanding online government services. Additionally, the Ministry of Information and Communication designated 2023 as the Year of National Digital Data.

However, Viet Nam's approach to freedom of speech has attracted international scrutiny. Several laws restrict transparency and citizen participation in government affairs. The 2022 National Socio-Economic Plan includes initiatives to improve information dissemination, alongside measures to counter 'untrue, bad, and malicious information.' The NGOs Legal Initiatives for Viet Nam, Article 19, and Open Net raised significant concerns about the criminalisation of free speech and the frequent imprisonment of bloggers and journalists in their submission to the UN Human Rights Committee on 24th March 2024.

- Viet Nam is not a member country of the **Open Government Partnership (OGP)**.
- As of today (September 2024) Viet Nam has not committed to join the **Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI)**.



The importance of public access to government information is also emphasised in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Target 16.10 of the SDGs calls on all states to adopt legislation or policies guaranteeing the right to information, which is essential not only for the achievement of Goal 16, but is an enabler to achieving other SDGs.




² <https://towardstransparency.org/en/vietnam-right-to-information-law-weak/>

ABOUT THIS ASSESSMENT

This is the first time that Viet Nam has been assessed regarding the online transparency of its marine fisheries sector.

This TAKING STOCK assessment covers 12 thematic areas of fisheries management, as defined by the FiTI Standard.³

The **FiTI Standard** is the only internationally recognised framework that defines what information on fisheries management should be published online by national authorities. The FiTI Standard was developed over two years in a global multi-stakeholder endeavour. Its objective is to contribute to the sustainability of marine fisheries by increasing the accessibility and credibility of national fisheries management information.

- | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|-----|--|------------------------------------|
| #1 |  | Fisheries Laws, Regulations and Official Policy Documents | #7 |  | Post-Harvest Sector and Fish Trade |
| #2 |  | Fisheries Tenure Arrangements | #8 |  | Fisheries Law Enforcement |
| #3 |  | Foreign Fishing Access Agreements | #9 |  | Labour Standards |
| #4 |  | The State of the Fisheries Resources | #10 |  | Fisheries Subsidies |
| #5 |  | Large-Scale Fisheries | #11 |  | Official Development Assistance |
| #6 |  | Small-Scale Fisheries | #12 |  | Beneficial Ownership |

For this assessment, these 12 thematic areas have been broken down into a total of **39 transparency elements**.⁴

³ <https://fiti.global/fiti-standard>

⁴ An overview of these 39 transparency elements can be found in the section '[Key findings](#)'.

This assessment evaluates whether basic information on Viet Nam's marine fisheries sector is **freely available** on government websites, whether it is **up to date** and whether it is **easy to find**.⁵



Additionally, this assessment:

- Considers whether information is published in a way that renders it easy to **(re)use**, e.g. to download, search and filter;
- Documents instances of **'good transparency practices'**, where published information allows non-experts to draw reliable conclusions;⁶ and
- Proposes practical **recommendations** to improve online transparency around Viet Nam's marine fisheries sector.



**SOCIALIST
REPUBLIC
OF VIET NAM**

This assessment is intended to support national authorities in Viet Nam to improve transparency in fisheries management and to stimulate interest in fisheries among a wide range of stakeholders.

It also establishes a comprehensive benchmark for evaluating progress over time.



⁵ For more information about the assessment's methodology, please refer to <https://.fiti.global/taking-stock/methodology>.

⁶ For example, national authorities may utilise innovative techniques to help visualise information, such as online information systems or fact sheets.



Public disclosure of information cannot be directly equated with actual progress towards sustainable fisheries management.

A lack of transparency in fisheries management is not always a deliberate state of affairs. Governments with poor levels of transparency are often viewed negatively, as if driven by the desire to hide information from public scrutiny. However, what may be perceived as opacity or secretive practices is often the result of other factors, such as the complexity of the fisheries sector, a lack of technology, expertise and staff, or legal concerns. Some government ministries or national agencies, particularly those that are underfunded, may not prioritise transparency. Unfortunately, these arguments can also be used as a convenient excuse to avoid scrutiny.

A low level of transparency in this **TAKING STOCK** assessment may not be a sign of wrongdoing, but rather highlights an opportunity for national authorities to enhance disclosure to stakeholders. Likewise, a high level illustrates strong disclosure systems, but this may not reflect operational success regarding the sustainable management of marine fisheries.

Transparency should also not be misinterpreted as a direct indicator for ethical behaviour, such as honesty and integrity.

This assessment is therefore not an end in itself. Instead, it takes stock of current disclosure practices against an internationally recognised transparency framework – the FiTI Standard – with a view to starting a conversation with all relevant stakeholders in the marine fisheries sector of Viet Nam.

The ambition is that this and future **TAKING STOCK** assessments will contribute to making government transparency the global norm in fisheries management.

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION ON MARINE FISHERIES IN VIET NAM



Recent developments relevant to Viet Nam's marine fisheries sector



Viet Nam has developed a centralised fisheries information database, known as VNFishbase, which has been supported by the World Bank. However, public access to this database has yet to be provided. Allowing public access to this database will be a straightforward way of improving fisheries transparency.



Viet Nam addressed the EU's Yellow Card for Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing by introducing a range of new laws and policy guidelines aimed at improving compliance in the fisheries sector. The European Commission and the Vietnamese government agreed on an action plan to lift the Yellow Card, though the details of this plan remain confidential.



In 2024, Viet Nam is set to publish its first National Marine Spatial Master Plan, marking a significant milestone in the country's approach to marine management. While the government has developed various long-term strategies impacting fisheries management, there are inconsistencies between these policies. The introduction of the National Marine Spatial Master Plan presents an opportunity to enhance policy coherence and provide a clearer framework for Viet Nam's marine conservation efforts. This plan will also support the country's international commitments, including the goal of designating 30% of its marine areas as protected zones.



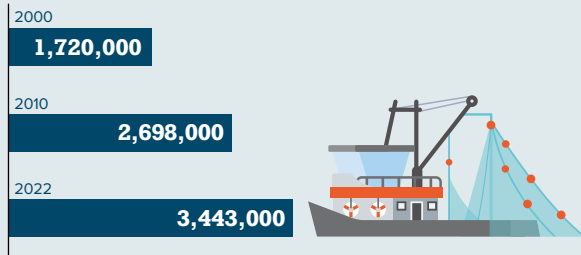
VIET NAM

The marine fisheries sector in Viet Nam plays an important role in fulfilling the economic, employment, food security and nutrition needs of its citizens.⁷



Capture fisheries production

(tonnes, live weight)

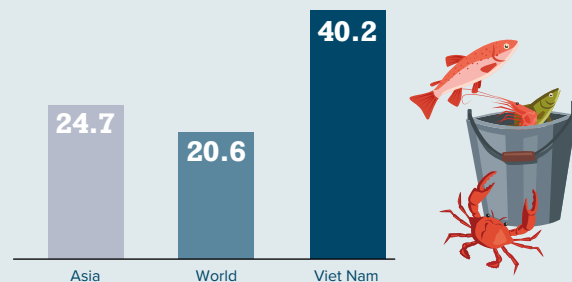


Viet Nam is the 7th largest fishing nation in the world (based on capture volume)

Source: FAO The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2024

Fish available for consumption

kg/per capita



Source: FAO The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2024, FAO Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics 2021 (published in 2023)

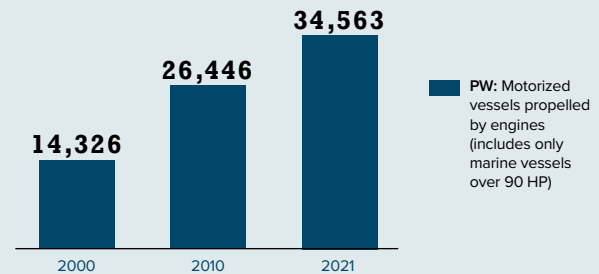
Number of fishers



Source: FAO Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics 2021 (published in 2023)

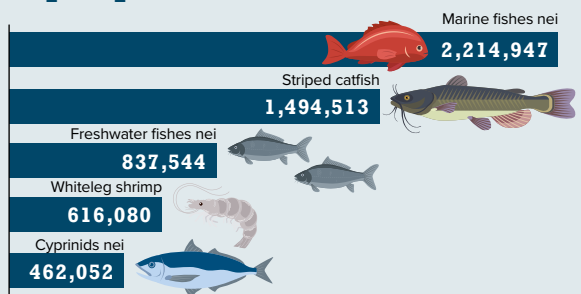
Number of fishing vessels

(estimates)



Source: FAO Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics 2021 (published in 2023)

Top 5 species



Source: FAO GLOBEFISH Market Profile - Viet Nam 2020 (in tonnes, by production volume)

Export of fish and fish products

Viet Nam is the **3rd largest exporter** in the world of fishery commodities.



Source: FAO Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics 2021 (published in 2023)

⁷ This information reflects international statistics (e.g. from the United Nations FAO), which in some cases may differ from national statistics. In addition, this report does not state the contribution of Viet Nam's fisheries sector to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Although this is a common way of expressing the economic value of fisheries, GDP is not sufficient for fully representing the overall social, economic and environmental costs and benefits of the sector.

KEY FINDINGS

PUBLIC ACCESS TO FISHERIES INFORMATION

KEY FINDINGS
 Public access to fisheries information

VIET NAM

! Viet Nam's national authorities collate and produce significant information about the country's fisheries sector. The country is therefore not data deficient. However, our assessment shows the need for national authorities in Viet Nam to improve public access to fisheries management information. The majority of information is not publicly accessible, and the quality of what is available online can often be improved.

- For **12 out of 34** applicable transparency elements, Viet Nam's national authorities publish information online (,Public Access').
- For **15** transparency elements there is no information published.
- For **7** transparency elements no information has yet been produced by Viet Nam's national authorities.

Strong public access

Information for 2 transparency elements is **available online, up to date and easy to find.**

Moderate public access

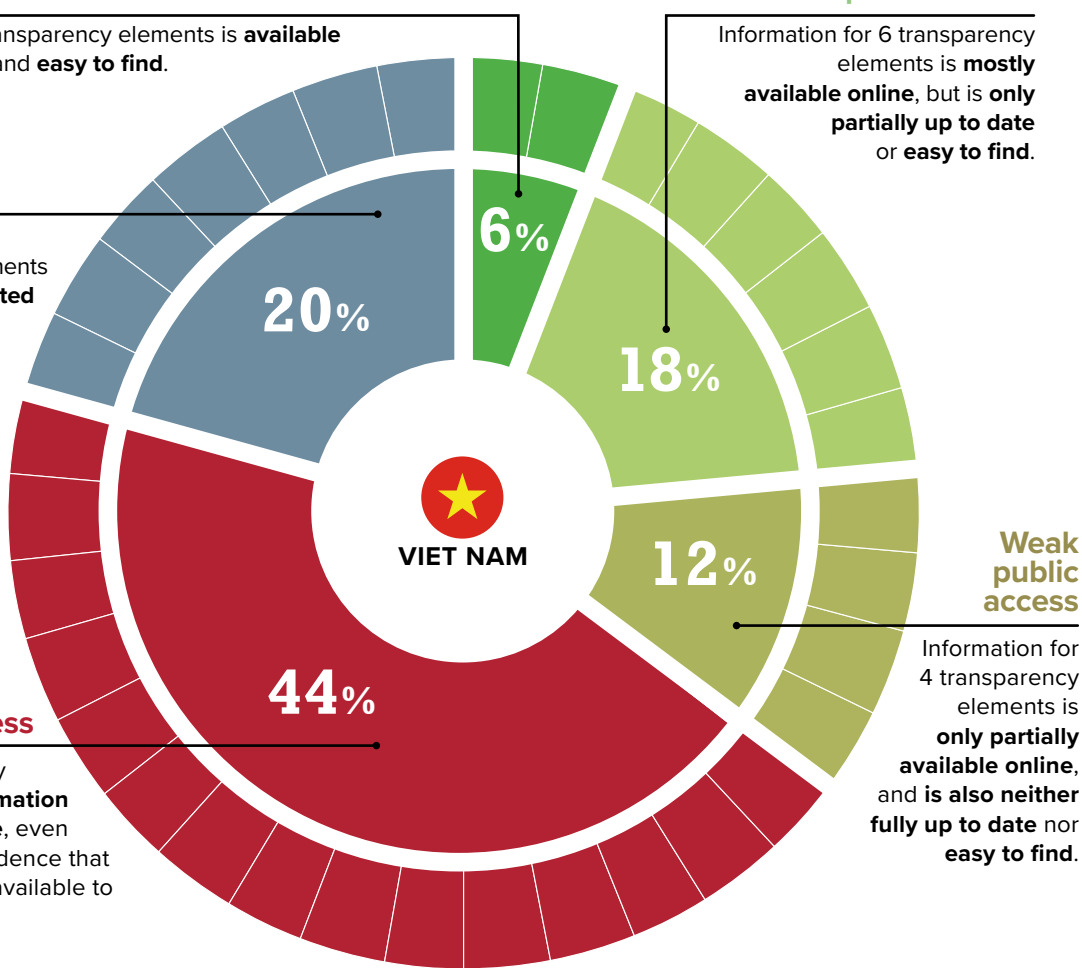
Information for 6 transparency elements is **mostly available online, but is only partially up to date or easy to find.**

Not produced

Information for 7 transparency elements has **not been collected or compiled yet.**










No public access







For 15 transparency elements, **no information is published online**, even though there is evidence that this information is available to national authorities.



● 5 of the 39 transparency elements are considered as **not applicable** to Viet Nam's marine fisheries sector (see [Annex](#)).

DETAILED OVERVIEW








						
Thematic area	ID	Transparency element	AVAILABLE ONLINE?	UP TO DATE?	EASY TO FIND?	
 Fisheries Laws, Regulations and Official Policy Documents	1-A	Laws on marine fisheries	✓	✓	✗	Moderate public access
	1-B	Fisheries policy documents	✓	✓	✗	Moderate public access
	1-C	Fisheries management plans	✗	✗	✗	No public access
 Fisheries Tenure Arrangements	2-A	Commercial fishing (large-scale and small-scale)	✓	✓	✓	Strong public access
	2-B	Coastal subsistence fishing	⊘	⊘	⊘	Not produced
	2-C	Scientific and exploratory fishing	⊘	⊘	⊘	Not produced
	2-D	Sport fishing	⊘	⊘	⊘	Not produced
 Foreign Fishing Access Agreements	3-A	Foreign-flagged vessels fishing in Viet Nam waters	—	—	—	Not applicable
	3-B	Viet Nam-flagged vessels fishing in foreign waters	—	—	—	Not applicable
 The State of the Fisheries Resources	4-A	National reports on the state of marine fish populations	⊘	⊘	⊘	Not produced
	4-B	Scientific stock assessments	✓	✗	✗	Weak public access
 Large-Scale Fisheries	5-A	Vessels	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	5-B	Payments	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	5-C	Catches within Viet Nam waters	✓	✗	✓	Weak public access
	5-D	Catches outside Viet Nam waters	—	—	—	Not applicable
	5-E	Landings in Viet Nam ports	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	5-F	Transshipments and landings in foreign ports	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	5-G	Discards	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	5-H	Fishing effort	✗	✗	✗	No public access







 To a full extent
  To a large extent
  To a limited extent
  No
  Not produced
  Not applicable

KEY FINDINGS
Public access to fisheries information



DETAILED OVERVIEW

Thematic area	ID	Transparency element	AVAILABLE ONLINE?	UP TO DATE?	EASY TO FIND?	
 Small-Scale Fisheries	6-A	Vessels	✓	✗	✗	Weak public access
	6-B	Licenses	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	6-C	Fishers	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	6-D	Payments	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	6-E	Catches	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
	6-F	Discards	—	—	—	Not applicable
 Post-Harvest Sector and Fish Trade	7-A	Imports	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
	7-B	Exports	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
	7-C	Employment in commercial fisheries	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	7-D	Employment in informal fisheries	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
 Fisheries Law Enforcement	8-A	Enforcement of laws	✓	✓	✗	Weak public access
	8-B	Sanctions for major offences	✗	✗	✗	No public access
 Labour Standards	9-A	Enforcement of labour standards	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	9-B	Sanctions for labour standard offences	⊘	⊘	⊘	Not produced
 Fisheries Subsidies	10-A	Government financial transfers or subsidies	✗	✗	✗	No public access
 Official Development Assistance	11-A	Assistance for national fisheries development	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	11-B	Assistance for foreign fisheries development	—	—	—	Not applicable
 Beneficial Ownership	12-A	Legal basis for beneficial ownership transparency	✓	✓	✓	Strong public access
	12-B	Beneficial ownership registry	⊘	⊘	⊘	Not produced
	12-C	Beneficial ownership disclosure in fisheries	⊘	⊘	⊘	Not produced

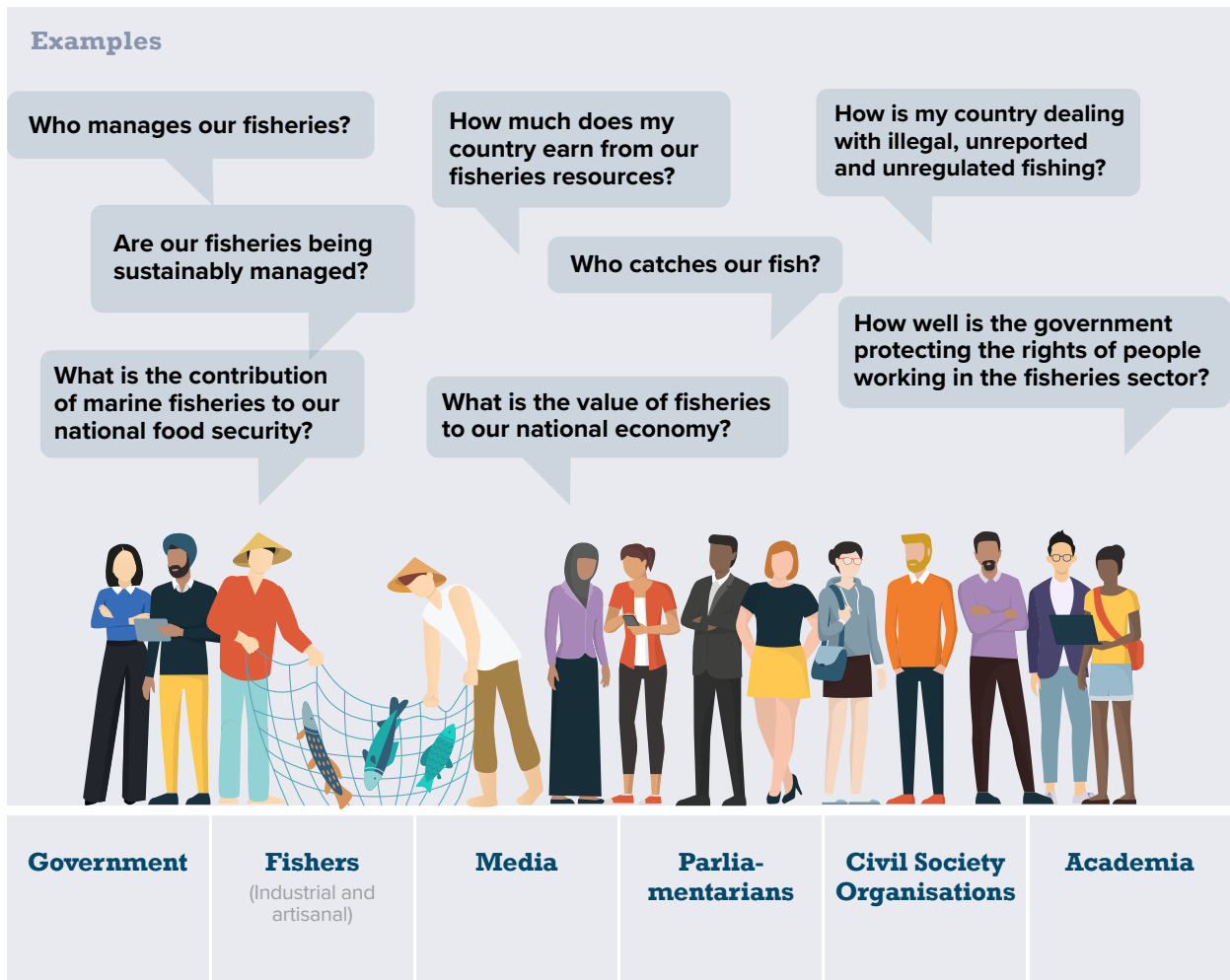
 To a full extent
  To a large extent
  To a limited extent
  No
  Not produced
  Not applicable



GIVING MEANING TO TRANSPARENCY: NOTABLE EXAMPLES



The value of this TAKING STOCK assessment does not only lie in understanding what information on a country’s marine fisheries is available online, and where gaps exist. Fundamentally, and in very simple terms, **public access to fisheries information is important to help answer critical questions about the sustainability of the sector.**



Given the complexity of fisheries management, answering such questions is not always a straightforward task. However, by increasing public access to fisheries information, governments provide their citizens and business partners the necessary means to engage in informed public debates.



The government of Viet Nam does not currently publish information online regarding numerous key areas, meaning that many important questions about the sustainable management of marine fisheries cannot be addressed. Notable examples include:⁸

✘	What is the health of marine fish populations in Viet Nam?	The government, led by the Vietnamese Research Institute for Marine Fisheries, undertakes some scientific research on the status of fish populations targeted by commercial fishing. However, public access to the findings of these studies is limited, and there is no mechanism for systematically informing the public of long-term trends. This gap in transparency and communication makes it harder to assess the potential impacts of unsustainable fishing practices over time.
✘	How much fish is caught by small-scale fisheries compared to large scale fisheries?	Although the government publishes data on the total catches for marine fisheries, there is no breakdown of catches for different fisheries sub-sectors. This makes it impossible for the public to understand trends in catches between large-scale fisheries and the small-scale sector.
✘	How many people are employed in the post-harvest sector?	The government conducts a National Rural, Agricultural and Fishery Census every five years, although the last census was conducted in 2016 and there was no census carried out in 2021. A key limitation of the design of this census is that it does not clearly differentiate between various types of employment in the fishery sector, such as workers in wild capture fisheries versus those in aquaculture. There is no reliable information on the numbers of men and women who are dependent on wild capture fisheries for their livelihoods.
✘	What financial support is provided to the development of the fisheries sector?	There is no detailed government information on the value of government subsidies to the fisheries sector. Viet Nam has shared data on government support to the fisheries sector with the OECD, however data is only available up to 2020. Notifications sent by Viet Nam on fisheries subsidies to the World Trade Organisation contain no information on the value of subsidies either.
✘	How much public revenue is generated from commercial fisheries?	The government does not publish information on the license fees charged to commercial fishing companies. It is therefore not possible for the public to understand how much the government earns from fisheries and how this money is used.
✘	What is the purpose and outcomes of donor funded projects in the fisheries sector?	Multiple donors provide funding for fisheries projects in Viet Nam, however, the government does not provide public information on the implementation and outcomes of these projects.

⁸ Countries that implement the FITI follow its core principle of 'progressive improvement', which states that countries are not expected to have complete data for every transparency requirement from the beginning. Instead, public authorities must disclose the information they have, and where important gaps exist, demonstrate improvements over time.



Unlike the previous examples, where information is available to the national authorities of Viet Nam but not yet published online, there are also several important aspects of the country's fisheries sector where no information exists at all. This clearly impedes the government's ability to manage fisheries sustainably, as well as stakeholders' ability to better understand their fisheries sector. Notable examples include:⁹

	<p>How are subsistence fishing, sport fishing and scientific fishing regulated in Viet Nam?</p>	<p>Although national laws and regulations describe tenure rules for commercial fisheries, there is no public documentation on the rules applicable for non-commercial fisheries, which includes fishing for personal consumption, sports and recreational fishing, and fishing for scientific research.</p>
	<p>Who owns fishing companies in Viet Nam?</p>	<p>Viet Nam has yet to establish a system for collating information on the beneficial owners of fishing companies.</p>
	<p>How are labour standards in the fisheries sector being upheld?</p>	<p>The government does not seem to collate information on working conditions of people employed in the fisheries sector and the extent to which labour laws are complied with.</p>

In Viet Nam, certain information provided by national authorities allows the public to be informed on several key policy issues and, therefore, helps to answer certain 'big picture' questions. Notable examples include:

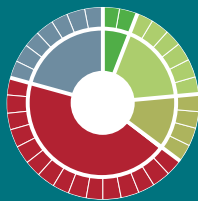
	<p>What are the trends in catches from marine fisheries?</p>	<p>The government provides information on reported catches from marine fisheries, disaggregated for key species. This provides the public with an understanding on the growth of fisheries production overtime.</p>
	<p>What are the trends in the number of fishing vessels in Viet Nam?</p>	<p>The government provides information on the number of licensed fishing vessels, broken down according to the vessel length and weight. This provides the public with an understanding on the changes to the composition of the fishing fleet overtime. However, data on vessels less than 5 meters in length is not collated.</p>
	<p>How much fish is imported and exported?</p>	<p>The government provides data on fish trade, showing volumes of imports and exports for key species.</p>

⁹ It is possible this information is published by national authorities online, but this assessment was unable to locate it, mainly due to the challenges of searching through government websites.

A DEEP DIVE INTO PUBLIC ACCESS TO FISHERIES INFORMATION



VIET NAM



Additional important insights can be gained by understanding whether the published information ('Public access') meets basic information requirements, is up to date and easy to find.



AVAILABLE
ONLINE?



UP TO DATE?



EASY TO FIND?



AVAILABLE ONLINE?

AVAILABLE
ONLINE?

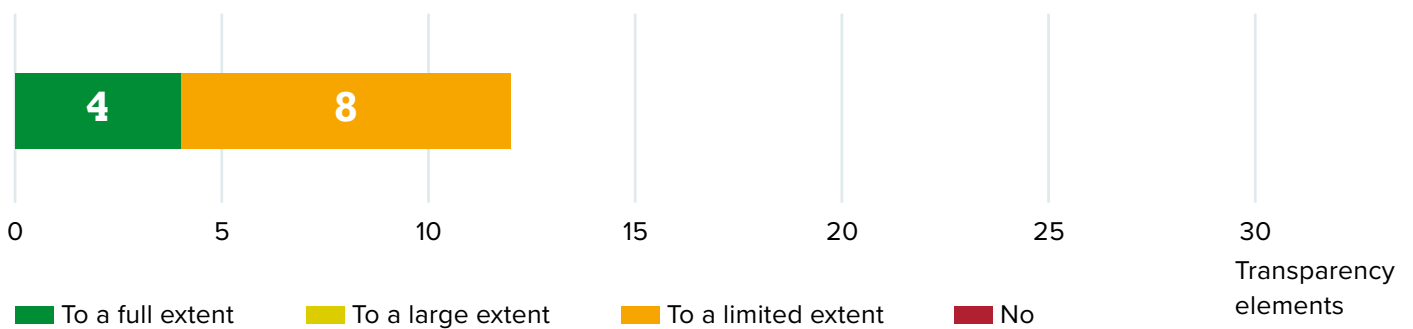


Viet Nam's national authorities publish information online for 12 transparency elements (i.e 'Public access'). Of those elements, less than half (33%) fully meet the information requirements of the FiTI Standard.

A DEEP DIVE INTO
PUBLIC ACCESS TO
FISHERIES INFORMATION



Is information in accordance with the FiTI Standard available online?



In 2021, the government of Viet Nam launched a National Digital Transformation Programme with targets to digitise government-held information, increase citizens' access to the internet, and migrate more government services online. In line with practices adopted by several other countries, Viet Nam launched their central government website, designed to serve as a unified portal, providing the public with access to all government-held information. This central portal provides access to the websites of key national authorities responsible for the management of marine fisheries (www.vietnam.gov.vn).

The primary national authority tasked with managing marine fisheries is the Directorate of Fisheries (DOF), which is situated within the Ministry for Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). Other departments within the Ministry involved in compiling information on fisheries include the Viet Nam Institute for Fisheries Economics and Planning and the Viet Nam Research Institute for Marine Fisheries. Several other Ministries have responsibilities that directly influence the marine fisheries sector. This includes the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MONRE), which has a department for the Administration of the Sea and Islands. The Vietnamese Coast Guard, situated under the Ministry of National Defence, is also the primary government organisation that enforces fisheries laws.



This assessment found that information on fisheries management published by national authorities in Viet Nam is limited, and the architecture of government websites is hard to navigate (see below). Unlike many countries, Vietnamese authorities do not produce an annual report on the fisheries sector. Instead, the DOF website includes a link to a fisheries statistics database called VNFishbase, which was originally found through an external search (e.g. Google). This database has been in the developmental phase for several years, supported by World Bank-funded fisheries programmes. Currently, access is restricted by a password, making the statistical information non-public. However, highly aggregated summary data on the fisheries sector is available on the General Statistics Office website.

A key finding of this transparency assessment was the **challenge of understanding the legal and policy framework for managing marine fisheries**. Clear communication of national objectives and targets is a fundamental foundation for fisheries transparency. While the primary laws and regulations for managing fisheries are straightforward to locate and understand, national fisheries management is subject to a long list of planning documents produced at different levels of government and by different government institutions. There is no centralised information on fisheries policies or a dedicated webpage for this on the DOF's website.

The government of Viet Nam produces many 10-year strategic documents, the most senior of which is the General Socio-Economic Strategy document. Each Strategy document has a corresponding Master Plan, which is also used as the basis for 5-year and annual plans. Annual plans are important for government transparency as they include information on progress in meeting targets.

This assessment located five separate 10-year strategy documents that covered fisheries management and numerous subsidiary policy documents for each of these produced by different government ministries and departments. Strategy documents include the 'Strategy for Sustainable Development of Viet Nam's Marine Economy to 2030 with a Vision to 2045', (published in 2018), the document entitled 'Planning to Protect and Exploit Aquatic Resources in the Period 2021 – 2030, with a Vision to 2050', (published in 2020), and 'Viet Nam's Fisheries Development Strategy to 2030, vision to 2045', (published in 2021). Marine fisheries are also covered in the 'National Strategy for Biodiversity until 2030, with a Vision to 2050', and the 'National Action Plan for the Implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. Understanding the policy framework for fisheries in Viet Nam is made even more complex as each coastal province produces further strategic documents, master plans, and annual plans.

In 2024, Viet Nam's government, led by the Ministry for Natural Resources and the Environment, is finalising the National Marine Spatial Master Plan. However, this is yet to be published.

A comparison of these policy documents reveals inconsistencies between national objectives and targets, particularly concerning fish production volumes, the number of authorised fishing vessels, and the extent of marine protected areas where fishing is prohibited. Although 10-year and five-year plans are accessible on government websites, the corresponding annual plans seem to remain unpublished.



With regard to other information gaps in Viet Nam's fisheries sector, this assessment considers the following to be of particular importance:

■ Information on the health of fish populations

There is limited information published by national authorities on the status of fish populations targeted by commercial fisheries, despite evidence that Vietnamese authorities undertake regular scientific research on this. The importance of monitoring fish populations in Viet Nam is reflected in the decision by the Prime Minister to issue a government decree in 2022 for comprehensive surveys of fish stocks to be undertaken every five years (Decision No.523/QD-TTg).

The primary national authority for monitoring fish species is the Research Institute for Marine Fisheries (RIMF). The RIMF website does publish some scientific articles on fish stock assessments, but these are highly specialised and aimed at the scientific community. The coverage of these studies is also quite limited. During the period this assessment was undertaken, the RIMF website also became inaccessible. Consequently, there is no government information on the health of fish species, including accessible information indicating the extent of overfishing and progress in recovering fish populations.

■ Information on fishing vessels and catches

The General Statistical Office's website publishes aggregate statistical information on the number of fishing vessels and the number of catches of different species. However, the presentation of this data contains information gaps, which limits public access to information that explains important dimensions of fisheries management performance. For example, it is impossible to isolate catches made by different sectors, including large-scale industrial fisheries and the small-scale sector. Information on the size of small-scale fisheries is also incomplete, as no statistics are provided on the number of fishing vessels below 6 meters in length. Information on the number of small-scale fishing vessels and the number of full-time, part-time and seasonal fishers can be found through other sources, including fisheries statistics reported by Viet Nam's government to the OECD and the FAO. However, these figures are inconsistent, with FAO data compiled in its global database 'FishStat' indicating the number of fishers active in Viet Nam is more than double the amount reported by the OECD.

This assessment was unable to locate an online vessel registry for Viet Nam, nor does Viet Nam provide this information to the FAO's Global Record. However, vessel lists for specific fisheries can be found in the documentation provided by Fisheries Improvement Projects, available on the website <https://fisheryprogress.org>.

What is positive is that the General Statistical Office undertakes a National Rural, Agricultural and Fishery (NRAF) Census every five years. This provides more detailed information on the incomes of fishers and the number of households engaged in fisheries. Reports of the NRAF Census can be found on the GSO website for 2011 and 2016 but not for 2021. There are no reports online that explain why the census was not undertaken in 2021, but it is possible that this was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The government has announced that a NRAF Census will be conducted in 2025.

■ Information on law enforcement activities and the control of illegal fishing

In recent years Viet Nam's national authorities have elevated the importance of responding to illegal fishing in Viet Nam and by Vietnamese-flagged fishing vessels in foreign waters. This is clearly influenced by the European Commission's decision to issue Viet Nam a yellow card for IUU fishing in 2017. In response, the Vietnamese authorities have produced many new laws and policies aimed at restricting illegalities and increasing penalties, which also include scaling up the use of vessel monitoring systems and electronic catch certification. Information on implementing these policies is not comprehensive, while the action plan for addressing IUU fishing developed between the EC and the government of Viet Nam is treated as confidential.

This assessment also found information on the outcomes of law enforcement activities. Press statements issued by the DOF describe large numbers of violations for illegal fishing detected by law enforcement agencies, and substantial fines have been issued to fishing companies. However, information on major cases of illegal fishing is not available. What seems to be positive is that the DOF has compiled a list of vessels implicated in IUU fishing. However, the information published by the DOF is impossible to understand. On the DOF's website, there are over 200 downloadable spreadsheets, including annual reports, six monthly reports, monthly reports and reports for provinces. There are no headings to file names, which means a user must download each individually to understand what information they contain and for what date ranges and regions. Individual spreadsheets contain a large amount of information, including lists of vessels identified as not operating a VMS, vessels that do not have a licence and vessels that have previously been listed as not having been registered but are now registered. Many of these spreadsheets contain several hundred vessels. Although reporting on a per-vessel basis for infringements against fishing laws and regulations is useful for improving transparency in law enforcement efforts, the current approach to organising and presenting this information by the DOF is unlikely to help improve transparency.

■ Information on government subsidies

Direct and indirect subsidies have been provided to the fisheries sector in Viet Nam and have been critical to the sector's development. Information on the subsidy programme in the fisheries sector has been submitted to the World Trade Organization (WTO) through notifications from Viet Nam's government, although the last report was submitted in February 2020. Specific subsidies include state support for access to bank loans for boat building, a fishers insurance scheme and financial support for building infrastructure. The fishing sector has also received several tax incentives, including a reduction in income tax and import duties.

The government of Viet Nam is transparent about state-supported development programmes in the fisheries sector and provides information in the public domain on the purpose of fisheries support programmes. However, national authorities do not publish information on the values of these transfers. This information is missing from the notifications sent to the WTO. The OECD has compiled more detailed information on the value of government support to the fisheries sector in Viet Nam up until 2020.¹⁰ This illustrates that the government of Viet Nam collates such information and is willing to share it with other organisations. However, no evidence exists that this information is being published by national authorities in Viet Nam.

¹⁰ https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=FISH_INDICATORS

UP TO DATE?

UP TO DATE?

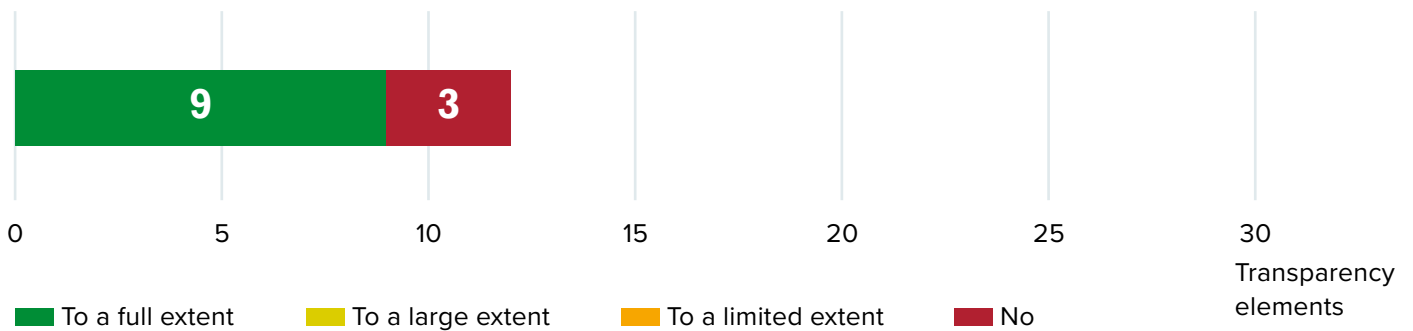


Information published online by Viet Nam's national authorities is considered to be up to date for 9 of the 12 transparency elements (or 75%).



Fish is a renewable resource that can, if sustainably managed, remain accessible and beneficial for generations. Those making decisions affecting fisheries must be able to have quick and easy access to the latest available data. The importance of up-to-date information takes on an even greater dimension when it comes to time-sensitive issues such as the production of catch data or scientific stock assessments.

Is the published information provided in a timely, up-to-date manner?



The limited information found for this assessment is generally considered up-to-date, with one key exception: government data on employment in the fisheries sector. The most recent figures come from the National Rural, Agricultural, and Fishery (NRAF) Census, which was last conducted in 2016.

EASY TO FIND?

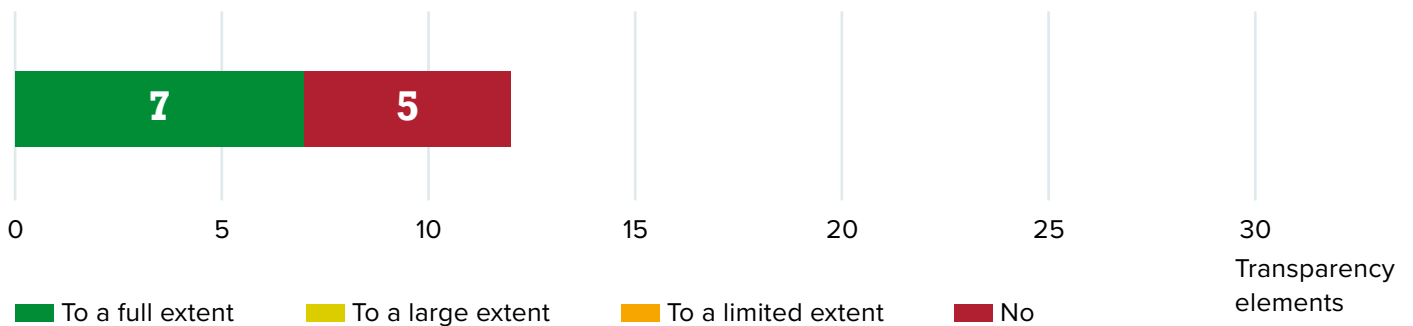
EASY TO FIND?



Information published online by Viet Nam national authorities is not considered easy to locate. Nonetheless, a layperson can readily access information for 7 out of the 12 transparency elements that fully meet the FiTI standard (58%).

Governments have the responsibility to manage fisheries on behalf of their citizens – and inform them about the current status, opportunities and challenges facing the sector. In the digital age, websites remain one of the most popular mediums to convey such information. However, websites are passive communications channels, and stakeholders have to purposely visit the site, search for the desired content and navigate to find information. If this is difficult or time consuming, stakeholders may lose interest, leaving potentially important information unread and underutilised.

Is the published information easy to find on a government website from a non-expert point of view?



Although this assessment could not locate substantial information on the fisheries sector in Viet Nam, the limited information that is available is generally hard to locate. The most intuitive place to search for government information on fisheries is the DOF's website. However, this provides a collection of articles and press releases only. There are no thematic pages to help organise government information, such as on laws and policies. Reviewing the DOF website's site map shows several unlinked pages, including one with spreadsheets on IUU fishing vessels, which was only found through an external search engine (e.g. Google).

This research found laws and policy documents relating to fisheries through a combination of Google searches and reviewing various government websites, including the document databases compiled by the MARD, DOF, and the central government portal. Compiling a list of policy documents took considerable time and effort, and it is uncertain that this research was complete.

‘GOOD TRANSPARENCY PRACTICES’



In addition to providing complete, timely and easy-to-find information, our assessments evaluate whether governments also publish information on the country’s fisheries sector that go beyond minimum standards and that the FiTI considers as ‘good transparency practices’.

No such practices were found for Viet Nam’s marine fisheries sector.



Finally, our assessment found that Viet Nam’s national authorities rarely integrate features into government websites or documents to ensure that published information can be freely used (e.g. via search and filter functions), re-used and redistributed by anyone.





RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL AUTHORITIES OF VIET NAM

This assessment has found government transparency in Viet Nam's fisheries sector to be quite poor. What is positive is that considerable evidence suggests Viet Nam's authorities collate large amounts of information. The challenge in improving transparency in Viet Nam's fisheries is, therefore, one of improving efforts to make this publicly accessible. The following measures could be prioritised in the short to medium term:

1. Provide public access to the VNFishbase

This assessment could not establish the content and quality of data contained in the VNFishbase. However, given the time and resources invested in this, it will likely contain much important information to help improve public understanding of fisheries management. Making the VNFishbase publicly accessible would substantially improve transparency.

2. Improve the DOF website

The Directorate of Fisheries (DOF) website is the most intuitive place for people to find information on fisheries management in Viet Nam. However, the existing website has limited information and is poorly designed, meaning not all information can be easily found. Improving the website could be achieved by using thematic headings for individual web pages, such as on laws and policies, fisheries statistics, stock assessments, government revenues and expenditures for the fisheries sector, and the government's efforts to address illegal fishing. The fisheries websites of other countries could be reviewed to act as inspiration. By designating the DOF website as the central online portal for fisheries information, it should also provide links to other government institutions where further information can be located, including the General Statistics Office and websites of provincial fishing authorities.

3. Provide a catalogue of fisheries laws and policy documents, including annual plans

Either as part of redesigning the DOF website or as a stand-alone initiative, an accessible summary of national laws and policies for the fisheries sector should be provided, with links to the underlying documents. Given the complex framework for national plans affecting the fisheries sector, the goals and targets for fisheries management should be consolidated into one document or web page. This should highlight any inconsistencies between different strategies and ensure that new strategies and plans are coherent.

It is further recommended that annual plans that report on the progress of five-year Master plans should be made public.

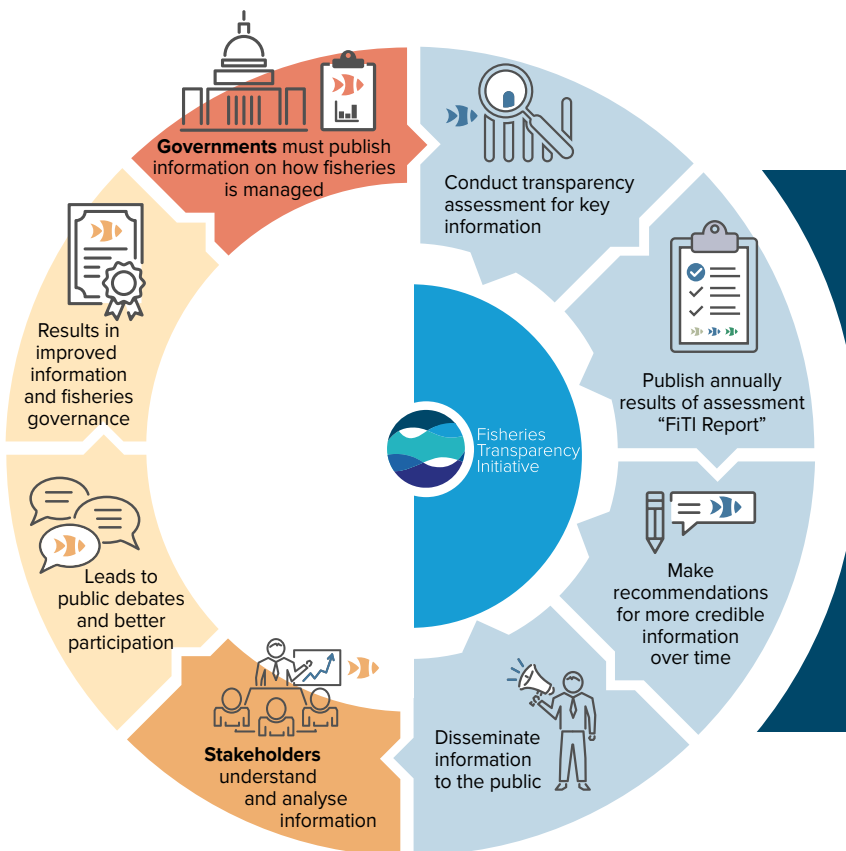
TRANSPARENCY NEEDS TRUST

Public access to information on how Viet Nam’s marine fisheries sector is being exploited is fundamental for good governance. This TAKING STOCK assessment provides a sound starting point for national authorities in Viet Nam to enhance and maintain high levels of transparency in marine fisheries management. But it does not tell the whole story: challenges still exist that are unlikely to be overcome by a single actor working alone. Such challenges involve determining whether information that is not published online simply does not exist, or whether information that is disclosed is perceived as credible by stakeholders. Addressing such challenges requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach.

Therefore, a collective effort is needed from all relevant stakeholders to incorporate a variety of perspectives and enhance transparency and trust over time.

The Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) provides such a unique combination of transparency and participation. The FiTI is implemented in countries through National Multi-Stakeholder Groups, consisting of representatives from government, business and organised civil society. These groups work collectively to:

- ▶▶ assess the information in the public domain against the FiTI Standard;
- ▶▶ make recommendations on how to prioritise the closure of information gaps; and
- ▶▶ provide suggestions on how information published by national authorities can be strengthened to further raise levels of openness and public access to information.



Engaging in the FiTI appeals to all stakeholders who appreciate the enormous value of marine fisheries, whether in terms of food and nutrition security, biodiversity, employment, the value to national economies, or the cultural importance of fishing.

#JoinFiTI

ANNEX: ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

This TAKING STOCK assessment evaluates the disclosure practices of Viet Nam’s national authorities across 12 thematic areas of **marine fisheries management**,¹¹ as defined by the FiTI Standard.

In order to avoid ambiguities during the assessment, these 12 thematic areas have been further broken down into **39 transparency elements**. For example, thematic area #1 ‘Fisheries Laws, Regulations and Official Policy Documents’ is broken down into three transparency elements.

The assessment is focused entirely on the availability of information¹² provided by Viet Nam’s national authorities through their own websites and online publications.

This report, the first for Viet Nam, does not only seek to provide an overview of what the government publishes regarding a number of key areas of its marine fisheries sector. It also intends to provide a sound basis of information to spark interest among various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

The assessment does **not** try to capture and display the actual underlying information behind each transparency element (e.g. number of vessels), nor does it undertake an independent verification of whether information disclosed online by national authorities is complete or correct. Nevertheless, if compelling evidence of unreliable or contradicting information has been found, it is noted in the Detailed Assessment Report.

Within the scope of this assessment, several different entry points have been utilised to evaluate whether information on Viet Nam’s marine fisheries sector is published online by national authorities, such as:¹³

- By directly accessing websites of national authorities, such as Ministry for Agriculture and Rural Development;
- By utilising external search engines, such as Google.

The assessment was conducted as a **desktop study** without relying on initial input or contributions from national authorities.

The assessment was conducted over a period of 12 months (August 2023 – August 2024). The process was officially launched on 24 August 2023 when the Director of the Viet Nam’s Directorate of Fisheries was informed about the upcoming assessment, its key parameters and benefits.

The Viet Nam Directorate of Fisheries was invited to comment on the initial research findings prior to the publication of this report. The timeframe for this review was between 21 November 2024 to 10 January 2025. No comments were received prior to the deadline. Therefore, the report was finalised without government input.

The overall assessment process was conducted under the supervision and responsibility of the FiTI International Secretariat, with significant input from researchers and reviewers.

11 Information on inland fisheries and aquaculture does not form part of this assessment.

12 Kindly note that in the context of this research, the terms ‘*data*’ and ‘*information*’ are used interchangeably. It is acknowledged that while closely intertwined, they differ in meaning and usage (e.g. data is the raw fact, which should be processed to gain information). However, this difference is not of major relevance for this assessment.

13 Information is only considered available online if it is proactively published on a government website and is available without access restrictions (e.g. the need to register online, request the data from a civil servant via email or pay a fee).

As part of this TAKING STOCK assessment, several transparency elements are considered as not applicable for Viet Nam’s marine fisheries:

-	Foreign fishing access agreements	This assessment found no evidence that Viet Nam has signed a bilateral fisheries agreement allowing foreign fishing vessels access to its national waters, nor has it signed a bilateral agreement with a foreign country allowing Vietnamese-flagged vessels to operate in its waters. In the past, Viet Nam had a reciprocal fisheries agreement with China for fishing in shared waters. However, this agreement was not renewed in 2020.
-	Catches outside Viet Nam’s waters	It is well documented that Vietnamese fishing vessels operate outside the country’s EEZ. However, this is unauthorised fishing. Vietnamese authorities could publish estimates on the scale of this fishing. However, because the fishing is unreported, authorities do not record it as catches from outside of Viet Nam’s EEZ.
-	Discards in Viet Nam’s small-scale fisheries sector	No information was found on discards from artisanal fisheries. This likely due to the fact that discards are very low to non-existent in small-scale fisheries.
-	Aid provided for the development of foreign fisheries	There is no evidence that Viet Nam provides development assistance for the fisheries sector to other countries.





Fisheries
Transparency
Initiative

TAKING STOCK

Online Transparency of Fisheries
Management Information



2024 Summary Assessment Report
SOCIALIST REPUBLIC
OF VIET NAM

Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI)

Highway Point Building, Providence
Mahé, Seychelles

Email: info@fiti.global

Internet: fiti.global

Twitter: [@FisheriesTI](https://twitter.com/FisheriesTI)

Facebook: [Fisheries Transparency Initiative](https://www.facebook.com/FisheriesTransparencyInitiative)